PLAIN ~~IX~~.

REASONS,

I. For Diſſenting from the Communion of the Church of *England*.

II. Why *Diſſenters* are not, nor cannot be guilty of SCHISM, in Separating from the Places of Publick Worſhip. *And*,

III. Several Common OBJECTIONS, brought by *Churchmen* againſt *Diſſenters*, Anſwer'd.

By a True PROTESTANT.

Ye ſhall obſerve to do AS the Lord your God commanded you; ye ſhall not turn aſide to the right hand or to the left, Deut. 5. 32.

Now I praiſe you, Brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the Ordinances, AS I delivered them to You, 1 Cor. 11. 2.

If two Churches differ one from another, a Man is bound to joyn with that which appears moſt to retain its Evangelical Purity. Dr. *Stil. Iren.*

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Plain Reasons, &c.

FOR as much as some of the Church of *England* lay on Dissenters the heavy Charge of *Schism*, and many of them know not how to clear themselves of that Charge: The following Pages are design'd,

1. To inform the more moderate of our Brethren in the Church of *England*, that we do not dissent from the Church out of Stubbornness, or because we love Contention; but from a tender Conscience, willing to keep the Ordinances, as well as the Doctrines of Jesus Christ *pure* and *intire*; not daring to add to them, or diminish any thing from them, under any Pretence whatsoever.

2. To furnish well-meaning Dissenters with *plain Reasons* for their common Practice: For we would have none go on Blindfold in Christianity, or take up a Profession among Dissenters, because their Fathers went before them in that Way, as if it were a Crime to step out of their Path: But we believe, that as every one ought *to be ready to give a Reason of the Hope that is in them*, so they should be ready to give a Reason of their *Practice*, in Religious Matters: For every one should be well perswaded in their own Mind, that what they do may be done in Faith; *for whatsoever is not of Faith, is Sin.* He that takes up any Profession, be it never so good, only from Education, without examining of it in every part, is never like to be a useful, if ever he be a true Christian.

Part I.

Containing Ten Reasons for Dissenting from the Church.

Reason I.

WE dissent from the Church of *England*, because we do not look on it to be so Pure a Church as some others are.

If any, by the *Church of England*, do understand the whole Nation, we declare we know no such Church. But if any take the Church of *England* for particular Parish Assemblies, or Congregations, then we do not say but some of them may be true Churches, tho' they may be defective in Doctrine and Discipline; (for a Man that hath lost his Hands to work, and his Feet to walk, and his Eyes to see, is a true Man, tho' defective;) And yet, we think, we have sufficient Warrant for our Practice in dissenting from them. For we do for our Souls, as they and we do for our Bodies: If we are Sick, we choose out a Skilful Physician; lest he kills, instead of curing, us. When we want Food, we take care to buy that which is wholsome, such as will nourish us. If we remove our Habitation, we choose out a good wholsome Air; not an unhealthy, sickly Place. If we change our Servants, we seek others that are skilful, faithful and diligent; not such as are either ignorant of their Work, or lazy in it; or such as care for nothing but their Wages: Then can any justly blame us, if we take as much care of our Souls, which are of more value? When many speak of the *Church* of *England*, they think of nothing else but *the Place* of Divine Worship; and they are strengthned in this Error, by the industrious Priestcraft of designing Men: For they know that the Greek Word, so often used for *Church* [in the New Testament] always signifies *the People met together*,

together, not *the Place* where they meet, *Acts* 14. 27. 1 *Cor.* 14. 23. But their design herein is to make the unthinking People believe, that if they leave that Place, they leave the Church of God.

But the *Place* of Worship [called the *Church*]

1. Cannot be the Church which Christ purchased with his own Blood, and which Ministers are charged to Feed, *Acts* 20. 28.

2. It cannot be the Church that brought the Apostle on in his Way, *Acts* 15. 3.

3. It cannot be the Church in an House, 1 *Cor.* 16. 19.

4. It cannot be the Church that was to be spoken to, and that was to speak to others, *Matt.* 18. 17.

5. It cannot be that Church, which is said to be *the Body of Christ*, and of which *Jesus Christ is the Head*, Col. 1. 24.

Q. What then is the Church?

A. " The Visible Church is a Congregation of " Faithful Men, met together to Worship God, in " which the pure Word of God is preach'd, and " the Sacraments be duly ministred, according to " Christ's Ordinance, in all those things that of ne- " cessity are requisite to the same.

(This is the 19th Article of the Church of *England*.) Wherein observe,

I. The Visible Church is a *Congregation*; therefore not a whole Nation: For when did the Church of *England* [so consider'd] *meet together* in one Congregation? By their own Words, the Visible Church must be no more than can *meet together*, to Worship God, in one Place, otherwise it's not a Congregation.

II. The Article saith, it is a Congregation of *Faithful Men*, (*i. e.* of Believers in Christ.) The Clergy know whether, in this matter, they Act according to their Articles; or whether saying the Creed will not do.

III. It is a Congregation where *the Pure Word of God is preach'd*. Here the Article affirms, that what

what they Preach must be *the Pure Word of God.* Not an Oration of the excellent Constitution of the Church, or of Passive Obedience, or an Exclamation against Schism, or a Discourse of Morality, or only exclaiming against such Vices as the very Light of Nature condemns.

But to Preach *the Pure Word of God*, is to Preach *Jesus Christ*, and Sinners need of an Interest in him, and of his Justifying Righteousness, and to magnify the Riches of Divine Grace in Man's Salvation: It is to Preach the Doctrines of *Faith*, *Repentance*, *Regeneration* and *Sanctification*, and the Necessity of the Power of the *Spirit of God*, in order to all these. These are the Doctrines that *Dissenters* Preach, and thus they Preach most agreeable to *the Pure Word of God*, and the 39 Articles of Religion: Therefore, tho' we are called *Dissenters*, yet many, that keep in the Church of *England*, are *Dissenters* more than we; For we Dissent only from *indifferent Things* (as they call them) but they Dissent from their own Articles of Faith.

IV. The Sacraments must be *duly Administred, according to Christ's Ordinance.*

V. *In Administration of the Ordinances of Christ there must be no unnecessary things imposed on Men.* Of these two last, after.

But by the way, since the Article saith, *That the Pure Word of God must be Preach'd*, it may not be amiss, here, to take a little Notice of the common Preachers of the Word in the Churches.

Many of the Ministers of the Church of *England* are Men of great Learning and Parts; but, it seems, that the most of them have little enough, and yet have more than any of them make good use of, you have their Picture drawn to the Life, and it would even afright a Christian to behold it, tho' drawn by a Skilful Hand. Bishop *Burnet*, *New Pref.* p. 5. 6. [For whose plainness, in exposing their hateful and shameful Ignorance and Idleness, some of the

Clergy

Clergy Curse him Bitterly.] His Words are these:

"Our Ember-Weeks * are the "Grief and Burden of my Life: "The much greater Part of those "who come to be Ordain'd, are Ignorant to a Degree "not to be apprehended by those who are not ob-"lig'd to know it: The easiest part of Knowledge, is "that to which they are the greatest Strangers; I "mean the plainest Parts of the Scriptures, which "they say, in excuse of this Ignorance, that their "Tutors in the University never mention'd the "Reading of them: So that they can give no Ac-"count, or at least but a very imperfect one, of the "Contents, even of the Gospels. Those who have "Read some few Books, yet never seem to have Read "the Scriptures: Many cannot give a tolerable Ac-"count, even of the Catechism it self, how Short "and Plain soever: They cry, and think it a sad "Disgrace to be deny'd Orders, tho' the Ignorance "of some is such, that in a well regulated state of "things, they would appear not knowing enough "to be admitted to the Holy Sacrament; this does "often tear my Heart. The Case is not much bet-"ter in many, who having got into Orders, come "for Institution, and cannot make it appear, that "they have read the Scriptures, or any one good Book, "since they were Ordain'd. *Thus far the Bishop:*

* When Preachers are Ordain'd.

We dare not trust our Precious Souls with such Guides: For how can they shew us the Way of Salvation, who cannot tell what the Gospels contain?

But suppose these were all very Learned Men, (which cannot be granted) yet they have little need of it, provided they can Read right; for all have their Prayers made for them, and many of them their Sermons too.

We honour Humane Learning much; but we do not count him the best Minister that hath the greatest Stock of that; but the Man who, with it, hath most Grace and Spiritual Experience; who Preaches

Jesus

Jesus Christ, and whose Ministry God most owns for the Conversion of Sinners, and Building up Believers in *their most Holy Faith*; and who himself lives a Holy Life. We believe that Ministers had better be defective in Humane Learning, than in the Grace of God; therefore, when we choose a Pastor, we do not enquire who Ordain'd him? Or, What Garments does he wear? But, What Doctrines does he Preach? What Life does he Live? And, are there any Signs of God's sending him? Not, Does he Preach in the Church, or in a Barn? But, Whether his Preaching be in Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power?

Reason II.

We Dissent from the Church of *England*, because we cannot take the Common-Prayer-Book for our Rule of Worship.

1. Because it orders the Reading of much of the *Apocrypha* (instead of the Pure Word of God) wherein are many things very Fabulous, and we think Untruths, things that *administer Questions, rather than Godly Edifying, which is in Faith.*

2. Because it appoints all Persons, Religiously, to observe above an Hundred and Fifty Days in the Year, as *Holy-Time*, besides all Sabbath-Days.

We *count the Sabbath of the Lord Honourable*; We also Religiously observe Occasional Days of Prayer and Thanksgiving, but cannot Bind our selves Religiously to observe what we have no Divine Warrant for: But are rather forbid the touching of. *Gal.* 4. 9, 10, 11. *But now, after that ye have known God, &c. How turn ye again to the Weak and Beggarly Elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in Bondage? Ye observe Days and Months, and Times and Years. I am afraid of you, least I have bestow'd on you Labour in vain.*

3. Because thereby are imposed on all Ministers Forms of Prayers. If it be granted (as we think there

there is no reason) that our Lord Jesus Christ made a Form of Prayer for his Disciples to be used Word for Word, without alteration, yet, by what Rule do any Men do so for others, and then impose them upon them for their constant Use?

We have a Promise of *the Spirit of Grace and of Supplications*, Zech. 12. 10. But no Promise of the help of the Spirit, to any Man or Men to make Forms for others.

If some use them in Sincerity, and can bring God no better, I believe God will accept them; but if we have a better Offering to bring, we must not offer that which *costs us nothing*.

If we tye up our selves to Forms, How can we say as St. *Paul*, Rom. 8. 26. *We know not what we should pray for, as we ought?* They that pray by a Book, know, to a Word, what they should pray for: If they have their Book, Light, Sight, and Learning enough to read it, they never need to be at a loss about the matter.

What if some Ministers need these Forms? Let such Parsons use them, that cannot do without them: But why must strong Men tye up their Legs, that they may use Stilts too? This is *to neglect*, and not *to stir up the Gift of God that is in them*; 2 Tim. 1. 6.

We never read, in all the Word of God, of any such Custom, as praying by Book; tho' we read of the Prayers of *Abraham*, *Jacob*, *Job*, *Moses*, *Samuel*, *David*, *Solomon*, *Elisha*, *Isaiah*, *Hezekiah*, *Jeremiah*, *Jona*, *Daniel*, *Ezra*, *Nehemiah*, and of the Apostles.

Doth an hungry or starving Man want a Form before him, to tell his Wants by? We should question whether that Beggar was not a Cheat, who could not tell his case, without reading of it out of his Book. If the Churches took due care to choose able Ministers, this Grievance would be laid aside: Or if it were left *indifferent*, as indifferent things should be, that *those might use them, that could*

 not

not Pray without them; Men would, for ſhame, take up another Practice. The Forms of Prayer and Books of Homilies, were both compos'd to help the (poor Tools of) Prieſts, at our firſt coming off from Popery: For the Prieſts were ſo Ignorant, that they could neither Pray nor Preach. But now, ſince in the Church, we have Men of more Learning and better Parts, why muſt they claim this *Benefit of the Clergy?* And why muſt the Homilies be laid aſide, and not the Forms of Prayer?

We verily think that thoſe who have the help of the Spirit of God to Preach, have his help alſo to Pray; but if they want *the Spirit of Grace and Supplication*, they are not fit to Preach.

Obj. 1. That Promiſe of the help of the Spirit of God in Prayer, is to raiſe our Affections, and to draw out Grace to its exerciſe in Prayer.

Anſw. We allow it Heartily; but that is not all, nor the principal thing intended: For the Promiſe is concerning *the matter*, as well as *the manner:* The Apoſtle, *Rom.* 8. 26. ſpeaking of God's fulfilling that Promiſe, *Zech.* 12. 10. doth not ſay, We know not *how* to Pray, but *what* to Pray for.

But in tying up our ſelves to Forms, we ſhut out the Work of the Spirit, as to *the matter*; and if we thus *limit the Holy One of* Iſrael, how can we promiſe our ſelves his help in the other? This ſeems, to us, like offering with *ſtrange Fire.*

Obj. 2. The way of praying by Book, hath been of very long ſtanding in the Church.

Anſw. But the way that Diſſenters take in Prayer, hath been uſed Two Thouſand Years before ever there was *any Book* in the World, and very probable, many more Thouſands before it became a Cuſtom for Chriſtians to Pray by Book.

Obj. 3. But when we addreſs our ſelves to God, we ſhould uſe the moſt decent Expreſſions.

Anſw. It is very true, we ſhould Worſhip *with Reverence and Godly Fear*. But it is the Heart, not fine

fine Words, or elegant Expressions, that God looks at; if the Heart be upright with God, in Prayer, and if it be done in Faith, God can, and will overlook an Hundred slips of the Tongue, and hear Prayer, tho' it be as *Hezekiah*'s, Isai. 38. 14. like *the chattering of a Crane or a Swallow.*

Obj. 4. Dissenters are liable to vent false Doctrines by their way of Praying.

Answ. So may those that keep strictly to a Form; Witness that daily Petition of the Church, "*Re-*"*member not, Lord, the Offences of our Fore-fathers.* What is truly intended in it, we do not dispute; but it looks like *Praying for the Dead.* So does that Form savour of Error, in the Order for Baptism, that places Pardon of Sin in *Regeneration*, instead of *the Merits of Christ.*

Obj. 5. Dissenters Prayers are often Incoherent.

Answ. So may Forms of Prayer be too. Take one instance in their own Words:

"*Almighty and everlasting God, who alone workest* "*great Marvels, send down upon our Bishops and Curates,* "&c. *thy Grace.* Must we say, that *it would be a great Marvel*, if *God should send down his Grace on Bishops and Curates?* Then where is the Coherence of that Prayer?

Obj. 6. For want of a Form, Dissenters Prayers are sometimes very unintelligible, the People know not what they intend, by some of their Petitions.

Answ. So may set Forms be too. Let their own Form be Witness:

"*Those things, which for our Unworthyness, we dare not* "*ask, and which for our Blindness, we cannot ask, vouch-*"*safe to give us*, &c. with many others like it.

Obj. 7. For want of a Form of Prayer, Dissenters are often guilty of many Tautologies, or Repetitions of the same thing.

Answ. Not half so often as those that use a Form: For they use the same Petition six, eight, ten or twenty times over; this seems to cross that Com-

mand, *Mat.* 6. 7. *When thou prayest, use not vain Repetitions, as the Heathen do: For they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking*, 1 Kings 18. 26.

Reason III.

We cannot join with the Church of *England* in their Order for Baptism.

1. We except against that Human Ordinance, Signing with the Cross.

" It is ordered to be done, *In token that hereafter* " *they shall not be ashamed to confess Christ crucified*. And so they make the Cross a Sacrament; for by their own Definition of a Sacrament, it is made an " *outward and visible Sign of inward and spiritual Grace*. We want a Warrant from the Word of God for it, before we can use it in Faith. It smells of the Vessel whence it was drawn. And we wonder why this is not laid aside, as well as *Salt*, *Cream* and *Spittle*, still used in Baptism by the Papists.

2. By the Form of Baptism in the Church of *England*, Parents are not suffered to Covenant with God for their own Children: But others must do it, tho' they be Strangers, and may never see the Child again: Nay, they must be other Persons, tho' the Parents were Gracious, and the Godfathers and Godmothers were Wicked; and so are more likely to neglect their Charge.

Obj. Godfathers and Godmothers were in Use under the Law, as Witnesses at Circumcision.

Answ. Besides the Circumciser, there were two Persons made use of; a *Woman*, whose work it was to carry the Child from the Mother to the Place of Circumcision, and back again to the Mother; and a *Man* to hold the Child in his Lap while it was Circumcised; but neither of them promised any thing for the Child, as these now do.

3. The Godfathers and Godmothers are forc'd to Promise what is in the Power of no Creature on Earth or in Heaven to Perform, *That the Child shall renounce*

renounce the Devil and all his Works, and constantly believe God's holy Word, and obediently keep all his Commandments, and walk in the same all the Days of his Life. And when all this is done, it is what *the most of them* never mind, either for themselves or the Child. Or, if they think of their Promises, how dare they put themselves in the Place of God? Whose Work it is, alone, to change the Heart, and work Faith in it; and to *cause Men to walk in his Statutes, and keep his Commandments, and do them, Ezek.* 36. 27.

4. We see no reason to believe, that every Child baptized with Water, is also regenerated by the special Grace of God, as they express in their Order for Baptism, in these Words;

We call upon thee for this Infant, that he coming to thy Holy Baptism, may receive Remission of Sins, by Spiritual Regeneration.

The Word of God tells us, that Remission of Sins is only by the Blood of Jesus Christ, not by *Water-Baptism*, nor by *Spiritual Regeneration.* So that there is a double Error in this Form, and they themselves have prov'd both of them ready to our hands, in the Order for the Communion; where they have these words, *In Remembrance of Christ's meritorious Cross and Passion, whereby, alone, we obtain Remission of Sins, and are made Partakers of the Kingdom of Heaven.*

5. In the Order for Baptism they assert, *That it is clear, from the Word of God, that Children baptized, and dying in their Infancy, before they commit actual Sin, are undoubtedly saved.*

It is not clear to us, nor can they shew it in all the Word of God. But Human Inventions commonly savour of Human Infirmities.

Reason IV.

We cannot join with the Church of *England* in the Lord's Supper;

D. Because

1. Because they order every one *to kneel* at their receiving it. It is the Custom of the *Papists* to do so, and their Reason is, Because they believe that the Bread, after Consecration, is the very Body of Christ: But, if it be not so, it looks like Idolatry to kneel before it. But because this was not the Custom of the Apostles, [but sitting, *Matt.* 26. 20, 26.] And because we are bid to *abstain from all appearance of Evil*; therefore we reject it.

2. Because they order the Sacrament to be administred to the Sick; and permit it to be done to two or three Persons, when there is no Church present. Because this Ordinance should be administred only in the Church; and because this Custom springs from the same ground with saying private Mass in Houses, and having no Warrant from the Word of God; therefore most of the reformed Churches rejected it, and therefore so do we.

3. Because Persons are allow'd to come to that Holy Ordinance, to qualify themselves for Places of Trust or Profit. This is a horrid Prophaning of a most Sacred Ordinance, that was never designed to serve instead of a License.

4. Because they ordinarily admit any Person to that Ordinance that desires it. And more; for, they order the Minister to invite all to it, that are present at hearing the Word, in this manner, *On such a Day we are to administer the Holy Communion, unto which, in God's behalf, I bid you all here present.* How this is done in *God's behalf*, we are at a loss, 'till we find a Warrant for it in the Word of God.

Are all that come to Church fit to go to the Table of the Lord? Whether they are or not, they must be all invited; It's manifest that many of them go thither but for their Hire. And it's manifest that many of them are very unfit to go to that holy Ordinance;

1. Because they are destitute of saving Knowledge and Faith, and are Strangers to true Repentance

tance and ſpiritual Regeneration. Be ſure, ſuch cannot *diſcern the Lord's Body*, but muſt Eat and Drink unworthily, tho' they ſay they are in Charity with all Men.

2. Many of them live very wicked Lives; *Swear* and be *Drunk* the ſame Night, and oft in the Week. To adminiſter the Holy Communion to ſuch, is *to caſt that which is holy to Dogs*; which we are expreſly forbid to do.

Reason V.

We diſſent from the Church of *England*, becauſe the generality of the Prieſts diſſent from their old Doctrines, and the chief of the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion; as may be ſeen by comparing their Preaching and Writings now, with the Writings of their old Godly Miniſters, in the Reign of Queen *Elizabeth*, and the Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh Thirteenth and Seventeeth Articles of the Church of *England*, and with the Nine Articles of *Lambeth*. Thus, they force us, either to diſſent from them, or from the old Doctrines: We chooſe to *keep to the good old Way*. And hence the *Church of* England *is beholden to us* to keep *their old Doctrines for them*. Dr. *Edward's Preacher*.

Reason VI.

We except againſt two things, eſpecially in the Orderfor the Burial of the Dead.

"1. *They thank God for taking them away:* (Bad as well as Good) we dare not do this at the Burial of many; becauſe we fear they die in their Sins, Strangers to Chriſt, true Faith, and real Holineſs. As we have no Warrant for ſuch an Univerſal Form, ſo none but an Enemy, or a Covetous Legatee, will heartily ſay *Amen*.

2. Nor can we ſay (as they do) of every one, (even the vileſt Wretches that they Bury) that "*We have ſure and certain Hope of their Reſurrection*

"*to*

"*to eternal Life*; for we verily think we should often speak against our Consciences, and the Perswasion of most that hear us. We believe the Doctrine of the Resurrection; but do not believe every one shall rise to Eternal Life, *Dan.* 12. 2. Those that believe the Doctrine of Purgatory, have much more colour of Reason for their use of this Form than we.

Reason VII.

We withdraw from the Communion of the Church of *England*, because we cannot allow of such Officers *in the Church*, as Diocesan, or Lord Bishops. As they are Lords, we honour them as Officers of State; but not as Bishops *in the Church*.

We own all faithful Pastors of Particular Congregations to be Scriptural Bishops, and the Scriptures know no other. Our Lord Jesus Christ forbad it, *Mar.* 10. 42, 45. *Ye know that they which are accounted to Rule over the Gentiles, exercise Lordship over them, and their great ones exercise Authority upon them, but so it shall not be among you; but whosoever will be Great among you, shall be your Minister; and whosoever among you will be the Chiefest, shall be Servant of all*, &c. and as the Scriptures know no such Office, so the First and Purest Ages of Christianity knew no such Office in the Churches.

Athanasius is said to be Bishop of *Alexandria*, (and a Bishop he was) but not a Diocesan Bishop; for he had no more Christians in his Community than might meet in *one* place. We read of abundance of Bishops in the Histories of the Church, for above 300 Years after Christ: But none of them could be Diocesan Bishops; because many of them were not above six, some five, some four, some three, and some but two Miles one from another. These were as near as our Parish-Ministers are one to another. But, more than that, we read of *two Bishops, in their Bishopricks, in the same City, at the same Time*; not setting up in Opposition one to another,

another, but by the Consent of both, as well as of the People. Thus it was at *Jerusalem*, at *Antioch* and *Ephesus*; so that their *Bishops* were but Presbyters, Elders or Pastors of particular Congregations: Such Bishops we heartily own.

REASON VIII.

We cannot allow that the Bishop or Patron should impose a Pastor upon any Parish, without the Consent and Choice of the People: But are willing to use the Liberty which God hath given us; that is, for the People to choose their own Pastor. "The fullest Words that the Greek Au-"thors use for all the Parts of Election; as, to "propose, to name, to choose, to decree, are (in "Church History) apply'd to the *People*; so that "in the Primitive Church, the *People* did propose, "name, elect and decree, as well as the Clergy; "and tho' the Presbyters had more Skill to judge, "yet the *People* had as much Right to choose their "own Pastors.

Thus, a Thousand Years after Christ's Ascension, the Council of *Nice* decreed, that "If any Bishop "decease, any other, reconcil'd to the Church, may "be admitted, provided they be worthy, and the "*People* do choose them. Should any one Man engross to himself, and his Heirs, the Power to impose upon every Woman in the Parish, such a Husband as he, or they think fit, it would be counted an intolerable Imposition: We look on this Custom of imposing a Pastor upon a Church, without the People's Choice and Consent, to have a very near resemblance to it.

REASON IX.

We dissent from the Church of *England*; because we think it wants *Godly Discipline*: This [as to one particular Branch] the Church confesseth every Year; and this Confession hath been a Form to them these Hundred Years, without alteration. It hardly looks like Sincerity, but there it stands unaltered;

1. For a Witness against themselves, that have Power to alter it, and do not.

2. For the Justification of those who dissent from them, because it wants Godly Discipline.

Some Discipline they have, but, if you will believe them, they want *Godly* Discipline; for all the Discipline they have, seems to be more to get Money, than to bring Sinners to Repentance.

If any Person commit a Fault, that is worthy of Excommunication, it is not in the Power of any Parish Minister, with all his Congregation, to Excommunicate that Offender; but this must be done by Lay-men; tho', I confess, it is done in the Bishop's Name, yet these Laymen do as they please. Of this matter, a Bishop of their own saith,

"The Church would be more secure, and more "unexceptionable, if the Administration of her "Discipline was put into other hands, and in a "better Method. *Bishop* Burnet.

There, little Crimes are sometimes punished heavily, as not wearing of the Surplice; and great ones come off lightly, or, it may be, are never enquired into, or are winked at; as the Parson, or Curate's being Drunk two or three times a Week, or Swearing at every other Sentence; it is as the Laymen please. Whether, there, *Money will answer all things*, we shall not enquire; but, be sure, it will answer the Place of Repentance; for when the Money is paid, the Offender is, again, a good Church-Member.

If any Man, Prosecuted in the Bishop's Court, gives any signs of Repentance, why is he not restor'd to his Place without Money? Why do they make a Gain of their Brother's Sins? And, if he does not give any signs of Repentance, how comes his Money to answer the Place of Repentance?

If Money will admit Persons into the Communion of the Church of *England*, we hope it never shall into our Churches: if such an Offender shou'd offer

offer his Money to us, on such an Account, we should think St. *Peter's* Answer to *Simon Magus*, did, in some sort, belong to him, " Thy Money pe-
" rish with thee; because thou thoughtest the Gift
" of God might be purchased with Money, thy
" Heart is not upright with God; thou art in the
" Gall of Bitterness, and Bond of Iniquity.

REASON X.

We leave the Communion of the Church of *England*, because it hath often shewn a Persecuting Spirit in it. We never Read that the Church of Christ did Persecute others; but *Jesus Christ* told his Disciples they must expect it. *They that live Godly in* Christ Jesus *must suffer Persecution.* This hath been just matter of Offence to us, that *Dissenters*, that live Honestly, Quietly, Soberly and Godly among them, have suffer'd much from the Church of *England* by Fines and Imprisonments, and have been hated; at the same time that Swearers, Drunkards, *&c.* have been free from Trouble, and spoken kindly to, provided they did but own themselves to be of the Church.

Obj. Dissenters may thank themselves for their own Stubbornness, for the Ceremonies are but *indifferent things.*

Answ. Why then do they not leave them indifferent; *i. e.* whether Men will use them or not? Why do they make them Terms, not only of Communion, but of Salvation; for they tell us, *that Schism*, on this Account, *is a Damning Sin, as much as Murder or Adultery.* It is strange, to us, how it shou'd be as dangerous to break the Laws of *Man*, as it is to break the Laws of *God*. But this is a real truth, that many warm Churchmen are more careful to avoid the Worship of Dissenters, than they are to avoid the Sins of Murder or Adultery. This is far from that Christian Spirit, 1 *Cor.* 8. 13. *I will eat no Flesh while the World standeth, lest I make my Brother to offend.*

That which Ministers deliver to the Churches they must, first, receive of the Lord, 1 *Cor.* 11. 23.

Princes are very jealous of their Soveraign Rights and Privileges; and, we believe, the Lord Jesus Christ is so of his; and that such Officious Intruders, will, one day, hear him say, *Who hath required these things at your hands?*

Especially, when by such Humane Ceremonies they keep many a Child of God out of the Church, tho' we and they too, have an express Charge, not to have any thing to do with such things, *Gal.* 5. 1. *Stand fast in the Liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again in the Yoke of Bondage.*

If God hath taken off the Yoke of *Jewish Ceremonies*, he never intended that Men should invent new ones, which tend to Superstition.

We believe that a Serpent of Brass, when it hath the Stamp of God's Authority on it, is better than a Golden Calf of Men's Invention; the one Heals, the other Hurts.

PART II.

Containing Six Reasons why Dissenters are not, nor cannot be guilty of Schism, in Separating from the Church of England.

SCHISM is Used,

I. FOR Breach of Union in the Church; thus, those that *abide in the Church*, may be guilty of Schism, more than those that Peaceably *leave it*; while they that remain in it, make Divisions and Parties, differing about Doctrines, *&c.* this is *Schism in the Body*, 1 Cor. 12. 25.

II. It is used for any *Causeless Seperation* from a Church; a *Peaceable departure* from any Church is not

not Schism; or when there is just cause for leaving its Communion.

But my present business is to prove, that even in the sense of the Church, Dissenters are not guilty of Schism.

REASON I.

The greatest part of the Body of *Dissenters*, now Living, never were Members of the Church of *England*; they never broke off from it, and therefore are not guilty of *Schism*.

Obj. But they were Born in *England*, and the Church of *England* is a National Church.

Answ. The Church of Christ was not so; for we read of seven distinct Churches in the lesser *Asia*, *Rev.* 1. 4. *And of the Churches of* Judea, which was once a National Church, *Gal.* 1. 22.

If our being Born in *England* makes us Church-Members, then, in order to any one's admission to the Lord's Supper, it need not be asked, Have you Faith? *&c.* but, Where was you Born?

Obj. But some of you gave your Consent to be Members of the Church of *England*.

Answ. It is true, and so we were Members indeed; but better understanding the Doctrines and Discipline of Christ's Church, and Christian Liberty, we have made no unlawful Rent in the Church, but have Peaceably join'd our selves to other Churches, where we are better satisfied, as St. *Paul*, *Gal.* 1. 13, 14, 15, 16. by his own Example has taught us.

REASON II.

If the Spirit of God is, in great measure, departed from any Church, then we may Dissent from it, without being guilty of Schism; for Schism is a causless Separation from any Church: But if this be true, our Separation is not causless.

Quest. But how shall we judge of this matter?

Answ. 1. If there be no Conversion-Work in the Church, then the Spirit of God is withdrawn from it: *Glorious things have been spoken of that City of God,*

that

that many have been Born in her. But now some of the best Ministers in the Church have confess'd, that after Forty Years Preaching in their Parish, they know not of one Soul converted in all that time. If there be no moving of the Waters, in vain do Souls look for healing at such a Pool.

If the generality, both of Ministers and People, hold no such Doctrine, and look for no such thing as Spiritual Regeneration, or being Born again, after Baptism (in Infancy) by the Spirit of God, through the Word; or if most look on this Doctrine, as *Presbyterian-Cant*, we conclude such are Strangers to any Experience of the thing; [for they are Strangers to the plain Gospel of Jesus Christ, *John* 3. 3, 5.] and that therefore we have sufficient Reason to attend on the Ministry, where the Doctrine of the New-Birth is preached, and where the Truth is experienced, and where Ministers can tell convinced Souls what they should do to be saved.

2. If there be little or no Comforting Presence of the Spirit of God there, then our Separation is not causless; and therefore it is not Schism. Some have said, that a Bottle of Wine, or a Dose of proper Physick, or a Tune on the Organs, would do as much for dejected Souls as *Dissenters* pretend to meet with, of Comfort, in their Worship; so little do many of them understand *how it is that God manifests himself to his own, as he doth not to the World*, John 14. 22. Therefore we choose to attend on the Ministry of such as have more Spiritual Experience, who may be able to *speak a word in season to our weary Souls.*

REASON III.

If in any Church there be but little real Holiness, or but little of the Power of Religion and Godliness, or but little more than a Name to live, we may leave the Communion of any such Church, without being guilty of Schism. 2 *Tim.* 3. 5. *Having the Form*

of

of Godlineſs, but denying the Power; from ſuch turn away.

In a large Pariſh, ſome of their own Members have confeſs'd, " That they could not find five Per-" ſons in their Community, of whom they were " perſwaded they were Believers, or real Chriſti-" ans; ſuch as ſhew'd an Hatred of Sin, and Love " to Holineſs. What Communion can a ſerious Chriſtian have with ſuch a Church?

If a Gardiner grows more fond and careful of Weeds than he is of uſeful Plants and Herbs, it is high time to ſeek another Garden, or another Gardiner.

If Miniſters preach Poorly, and Miniſters and People generally live Looſly, Vainly and Prophanely, (like Atheiſts) for our Souls ſake, we ſhould go where there is better Preaching, and better Living, *according to the glorious Goſpel*; and where the Form of Godlineſs doth not go without the Power, and where a miſguided Zeal for little, or *indifferent things*, does not eat out the Vitals of real Religion.

We can ſafely ſpeak it *to God*, as well as *to Men*, this is one great end of our Diſſenting from the Church of *England*; after we had ſtaid in it twenty, ſome thirty, ſome forty Years.

REASON IV.

If any Church impoſe on its Members, either that which is really Sinful, or is thought to be ſo; this will juſtifie any Perſon, in his peaceable leaving the Communion of that Church.

This was the Ground of the Church of *England's* Separation from the Church of *Rome*. Dr. *Ham*. And this is the Ground of *Diſſenters* Separation from the Church of *England*. Dr. *Stil. Iren.* p. 199. His Words are theſe, " When a Church requires " *unneceſſary* Conditions of Communinon; then " *that Church* muſt take on it's ſelf the Charge of " Schiſm. Let Men turn and wind themſelves " which way they will; by the very ſame Argu-" ments,

"ments, that any will prove Separation from the "Church of *Rome* to be lawful, because she re- "quir'd unlawful things, as Conditions of her Com- "munion; it will be prov'd lawful, not to con- "form to any suspected or unlawful Practice, re- "quir'd by any Church Government, upon the "same Terms; if the thing so requir'd be, by a "serious and sober Enquiry, judged unwarranta- "ble, by a Man's own Conscience. (In another place the same Author hath these Words;)

"The Duties Christ requir'd of his Disciples, "were none but such as were *necessary*; he that "came to take away the insupportable Yoke of "Jewish Ceremonies, certainly did never intend "to Gall the Necks of his Disciples with another "in stead of it. And it would be strange, that the "Church should require more than Christ himself "did, and make other Conditions of her Commu- "nion than our Saviour did of Discipleship. What "possible Reason can be given, why such things "should not be sufficient for Communion with a "Church, which are sufficient for Salvation? Was "there ever more True and Cordial Love in the "Churches, than in the times of the Apostles? "And yet they made no such Terms of Commu- "nion. How will they Answer it, at the great "Day, for keeping Men out of their Communion, "by such things, as they call *indifferent*? Will the "Lord Jesus Christ thank them for their *pretence of* "*Decency and Order*, when thereby they keep many "out of *their Church*, whom the Lord Jesus Christ "will admit into *Heaven*? *So far that learned Bishop.*

The Charge of Jesus Christ to his Disciples, is, *Go, teach them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.* And to such a Practice, and to no other, he hath affixed the Promise of his Presence with his Ministers, and his Churches: *Matt.* 28. 20. *Lo, I am with you, always, to the end of the World.*

REASON

REASON V.

If any Church, by virtue of Humane Laws, without any Warrant from the Word of God, cast out of their Communion such as held no false Doctrines, nor were guilty of any evil Practices, then that Church must take on it self the Charge of Schism.

This was the very Foundation of our Father's dissenting from the Church of *England*, when in the Year 1662. she [by the same Spirit with those Men, *Dan.* 6. 5.] cast out about two Thousand Godly Ministers, purely because they could not Sin against Christ and their own Consciences, in bringing into the Churches unnecessary Ceremonies. And herein it plainly appears, that the Schism is justly chargeable on the Church (not on them that were cast out) because that Act was made on purpose to cast them out; for some of the Actors said, before that day came, *that they were afraid the* Presbyterians *would continue in the Church.*

But if they would not let these Godly Ministers Preach in the Churches any longer, it is strange they could think, that they would shut their Mouths, and obey them rather than God: For God had given them a Commission to Preach, and had seal'd it, 1 *Cor.* 9. 2. and no Command of Men could acquit them of their Awful Charge, 1 *Cor.* 9. 16. *Necessity is laid upon me, and wo unto me, if I Preach not the Gospel.*

By these very Men, God hath perswaded many of our Fathers to turn from Sin to Christ; therefore they chose, rather to dissent from the Church than from the Ministry of those Godly Men; and the rather, because they saw that most of their Places, in the Churches, were very poorly fill'd up, [*viz.* by Ignorant or Scandalous Men.] And as our Fathers followed these Godly Men, in their Faith and Conversation; so, with Paternal and Christian Affection, they have charged many of us

to follow them, in their Doctrines and holy Life.

Thus the Church of *England* hath, unjustly, driven us out; and then they uncharitably condemn us for Schism: It is plain that the Sin lies at their Door, and we must see some hopeful Signs of their Repentance, for that Sin, before they may expect us to return to their Communion.

REASON VI.

If such as leave the Communion of the Church have a Lawful Dismission from the Church, they are not guilty of Schism.

This is the Case of all *Dissenters* in *England*, even of those that once were of the Church of *England*. This Dismission we have in the Act of Toleration, which is an Act of the King, who is own'd by themselves to be *the Head of the Church, over all Persons, and in all Causes*, both Ecclesiastical and Civil: Therefore it is too bold and daring for Men, that call themselves *Loyalists*, and especially for *Passive-Obedience* Professors, to charge Dissenters with Schism, as long as that Act is in Force.

PART III.

Some common Objections, brought by Churchmen against Dissenters, Answer'd.

Obj. 1. "OUR Church is of *older standing* than "yours.

Answ. And the Church of *Rome* is older than yours; for we read that the Mystery of Iniquity began to work in the Apostles time, 2 *Thess.* 2. 7. If there was any thing in this Argument, you and we must both turn *Papists*. We are bid *to enquire after the good Old Way*, Jer. 6. 16. but it must be *good* as well as *old*, else we must not *walk in it*.

And

And yet, if our Diſſenting Churches agree with Apoſtolical Doctrines, and Rules of Divine Worſhip, and Godly Diſcipline, better than yours, then our Churches are, truly, older than yours. To decide this matter, we are heartily willing to ſtand the Tryal of the Scriptures and of the Fathers for the firſt Three Hundred Years after the Aſcenſion of Chriſt.

Obj. 2. " The Church of *England* is eſtabliſhed by " Law, your Churches are not.

Anſw. And yet we do not cry out, *that our Church is in Danger*; for we know it is founded upon the Rock of Ages. *Matt.* 16. 18. *Upon this Rock I will build my Church, and the Gates of Hell ſhall not prevail againſt it.*

We conclude, from hence, that the Church, which is often *in Danger*, cannot be the Church of Chriſt; or that Church which is built on Chriſt the Rock.

The Laws of our Land favour us more than the Laws did *Jeſus Chriſt* and his Apoſtles; for thus they argue againſt *Chriſt*, *We have a Law, and by our Law he ought to dye*, John 19. 7. Thanks be to God, our Churches are Eſtabliſhed by the Laws of Heaven: And yet, as we hold to the moſt and beſt of the Thrity Nine Articles, which were eſtabliſhed by Law, ſo our Doctrine, if not our Churches, are eſtabliſh'd by Law. But ſuppoſe they are not eſtabliſh'd by Human Law, their Conſtitution is ſuch that they don't need ſuch Eſtabliſhment, and that Church is in a poor condition that does need it.

Obj. 3. " Our Places of Worſhip are Holy, yours " are not ſo.

Anſw. We know no difference of Places, now, ſince the coming of *Jeſus Chriſt*, John 4. 21. Yours are Holy, only as they are ſet apart for God's Worſhip, and ſo are ours.

But if your Places of Divine Worſhip are Holy, it's pity the Worſhippers themſelves are not more

agreeable to their Holy Places. The Place is nothing to us; for we had rather hear *Jesus Christ*, and *the pure Word of God*, preached in a Thatch'd House, than a Learned Oration in a Stately Cathedral, where Faith in *Christ*, and the Necessity of the New Birth, and the Power of the Spirit of God with the Word in order thereto, should be seldom heard of.

We can hear the Word, as the Disciples did *Jesus Christ*, on a Mountain, or out of a Ship, or in an House, or in a Barn, (God once chose a Threshing Floor to raise the Temple from, 2 *Chron.* 3. 1. and so he hath since rais'd many a Gospel Church, from the Pure and Powerful Preaching the Gospel, in such a place, seperating the Chaff from the Wheat, and making his Word Bread of Life to Souls.)

If we can but hear of *Christ* and his Salvation, we matter not in what Place; let it be at *Ephrata, or the Fields of the Wood*, Psal. 132. 6. And so can others sometimes, when they please, out of a Market-Cross, or under a Tree, or in a Ship, or in the open Field, which are not Holy, in their own Sense.

Obj. 4. "Do you, *Dissenters*, think you are in the "Right, and all our Learned Bishops and Doctors "in the Wrong? We have both the greatest Men, "and the greatest Numbers on our side.

Answ. We own it; and so had the *Jews*, in the Apostles Time; and so had the *Papist:* at the Reformation; *Rev.* 13. 3. *The whole World wondred after the Beast.* We wonder not to hear the old cry, *Have any of the Rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him?* What if they *do not*, will it follow that we *must not* believe? It may be, they are not to be Called effectually; for it is said, 1 *Cor.* 1. 26. *Ye see your Calling, Brethren, how that not many Wise Men after the Flesh, not many Mighty, not many Noble are called: But the Foolish, the Weak, the Base, and the Despised, that God might confound the Wise and the Mighty.* Little did

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the Chief Priests, Scribes and Pharisees, with the Body of the *Jewish* Nation, think, that a few mean *Dissenters* from the National Worship were *in the Right*, and all they *in the Wrong*: They were so far from that Thought, that they counted them Ignorant, Deluded and Cursed: *This People that knoweth not the Law are Cursed.* If *Christ*'s Disciples were to go in the Way that the Most, or the Greatest go they might have no Cross to take up, which Christ's Followers are sure to meet with.

When the Spirit of God would shew us how few they are, that bear witness to the Truths of Christ, he calls them *Two Witnesses*, Rev. 11. 3. to teach us not to choose our Religion by *Multitudes*, or reject Doctrines, because *few* believe them; for that may be *the Right Way* which *few find*, Matt. 7. 14. and fewer care to walk in, when they know it.

We think they have little reason *to boast* of their Multitudes, but rather *to blush* for their vain Conversation; for Multitudes of graceless Professors, do but disgrace any Profession, and keep Serious Christians out of their Communion.

Obj. 5. "*Dissenters* want Unity in their Churches, "they are of so many Opinions, that there is no "End of them.

Answ. We could wish it might be truly said of all that believe, among *Dissenters*, as was said of the Primitive Christians, that the Multitude of them were all of *one Heart*, and *one Soul*, Acts 4. 32. However, if a little after that, St. *Paul* and *Barnabas* fall out, we shall not condemn their Doctrines, or be afraid of their Way: For it was the Way of God, tho' they stumbled in it.

And truly the Church hath little more reason to boast of Unity than we have: Witness the warm Disputes and Divisions in Convocation, and the wide Divisions of *High* and *Low-Church*; the Difference in Doctrines, and manner of Reading the Prayers; some say all themselves, others make the

Clerk

Clerk say half the Prayers; some are for Organs and Anthems, others dislike them; some bow at the Name *Jesus*, others dislike it; some bow towards the *East*, others disapprove of the practice (as Heathenish, or as one of *Ezekiel*'s Abominations, *Ezek.* 8. 16.) Some are for kneeling at Baptism, others in the Church will not submit to it; the most Administer the Sacrament but three times a Year, others do it every Month, and some every Lord's-Day. Some never read Prayers in the Church on Week-Days, others think they are bound to do it every Day, and others compound for *Wednesday* and *Friday*.

And the Worship in the Cathedral differs very much from that in the Parish Churches.

The Mother hath her Singing *Men and Boys*, by the Dozens, in their Surplices; [this is all the Holiness that these Men have; as soon as they have done Acting here, they are also Actors in the Play-houses,] the Daughters content themselves with one Clerk a-piece, and allow him no Surplice; tho', in truth, they need such an Emblem of Holiness as much as the others; for they are often Men of most wicked Lives. The Mother *Sings* her Prayers (as if she was not in earnest) the Daughters *Read* theirs, tho' formal enough.

Many of the Church of *England*, themselves, are even Sick to see and hear Cathedral Decency and Order. " But if all in the Church of *England* were " of one Mind, God will one Day convince Men, " that the Unity of the Church lies more in the " Unity of *Faith* and *Affection*, than in the Uniformity of *Doubtful* Rights and Ceremonies; as saith their own Bp. *Still*.

" *Obj.* 6. The Church of *England* is more Charitable than Dissenting Churches are.

Answ. Let every one speak as they find; we know the Church hath shewn her Charity to some many ways, as in her Forgiveness of Offences, tho' on the slightest Hints of Sorrow; and in settling liberal

ral Yearly Incomes on very undeserving Persons, both Clergy and Laity; this made an old Doctor say, (while he was sweeping the Money into the Bag) "Well, our Church is the best-constituted Church "in the World.

Tho' some, whose Hearts are right with God, have higher Ends in joyning with the Church, yet many cry up the Church, for no better end than the Craftsmen did *Diana*, lest their gain should be lost. From such Money-changers, the Church needs to be purged, as Jesus Christ did the Temple, *with a Scourge of Cords.*

None make so much Noise of the Church, as those that seldom come there, or if they do, are the greatest Disgrace to it; such as have little to say for Religion, and who Practice less than they know: Unless we allow these to be Acts of Religion,

1. Their Drinking Healths to the Church, as if she was always in a Sickly Condition.

2. Their For-swearing themselves at Elections, under pretence of *upholding the Church.* What, is the Church in such a poor plight as to need the Forces of Hell to relieve it? But, O Shame! that any of the Clergy shou'd do so! Well, it seems, Dissenters are Uncharitable, and yet, I never heard of any one Dissenter, in my Life, that wish'd or drank the Damnation of the Church-Men: But have heard Parsons, as well as others, drink the Dissenters Damnation. (Cold Charity!) Neither is that any notable Piece of the Churches Charity, that will not part with a few *indifferent things*, tho' it were to save the Dissenters from Damnation. Not to say any thing of the heavy Fines and Imprisonments, whereby they have persecuted many Dissenters to their Graves, and their Families to extream Poverty.

If any, among us, transgress Gospel-Rules, we rebuke and exhort; and if they deserve it, we cast them out of the Church; and if they give evidence of Repentance, we are ready to take them in again with Joy.

But

But we cannot believe that a Man is sorry for his Sin of Drunkenness, when he continues to practise it; or that a Man is sorry for his Sins, on the Lord's-Day, that returns to them all the Week: We think we have no Warrant for such Charity.

CONCLUSION.

If the Church of *England* would but remove these Causes of Offence, they should soon see that we and our People would return to their Communion, provided they desire it (which we greatly question.) But till then, we take the Liberty, by Law, allow'd us; that is, Peaceably to withdraw our selves from their Communion; and therein to take up the Cross, and follow the Lord Jesus Christ; being willing to submit to Poverty, Disgrace and Contempt, in the World, rather than to Sin against God and our Consciences; and betray the Honour, that is due alone to our Lord Jesus Christ, into the Hands of Men, with a Kiss and Complement of *Hail Master*. We do not disturb the Church of *England* in their Worship; we do not call their Members to come to us; or if any of our *common* Hearers go to the Church, and abide there, we do not invite them back. And if, after all this, they will condemn us, let us comfort our selves, that God is with us, blessing our Ministry, for Sinners Conversion, and Believers Comfort and Growth in Grace.

FINIS.